



To: Members of the Children's Committee of the General Assembly

From: Hillary Teed, Public Policy Specialist
Connecticut Community Providers Association

Date: February 26, 2013

Re: S.B. 654, An Act Creating a Mental Health First Aid Program for Parents

Representative Urban, Senator Bartolomeo, and members of the Children's Committee:

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the CT Community Providers Association, which represents organizations providing community-based services for people with disabilities and significant challenges including children and adults with substance use disorders, mental illness, developmental, and physical disabilities. Community providers deliver quality health and human services to 500,000 of Connecticut's residents each year. We are the safety net.

We support S.B. 654, An Act Creating a Mental Health First Aid Program for Parents. We see this as an important first step in helping to better educate parents about mental health. The horrific school shooting in Newtown has brought renewed national attention to the fact that gun violence is a public health and public safety epidemic; it has also highlighted an urgent need for dramatically increased knowledge about mental health.

While we support this proposed bill, we feel that its scope should be expanded. We believe that this type of critical training must be made available to not only parents, but other community members including teachers. One of the tenets of the internationally utilized Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) program is that it is a public education program that trains everyday citizens to better identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. This includes crisis response, symptom recognition, and referral to behavioral health treatment.

We would also like to draw your attention to the pending federal legislation H.R. 274, introduced in Congress in January 2013. It authorizes \$20 million for FY 2014 for grants to train emergency services personnel, police officers, teachers, school administrators, faith community leaders, primary care professionals, and students in MHFA. Among other key outcomes, this training will help to reduce the stigma and discrimination associated with mental illness and addictions and it will help to quickly connect people to the professional resources they need. If H.R. 274 is approved, Connecticut should advocate for receiving a portion of those funds to help offset the cost of bringing the MHFA program to our state.

Thank you for considering our recommendations.

CCPA

35 Cold Springs Rd., Suite 522, Rocky Hill, CT 06067-3165
(P)860-257-7909 • (F)860-257-7777
www.ccpa-inc.org